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## THE CHILD-MIND AND CHILD-RELIGION

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### V. STAGES IN RELIGIOUS GROWTH

Religion varies with individuals. The time is happily passing when any person or group of persons will try to force all the rest into their particular mode of religious experience or shade of belief. As readily might a player in a symphony insist that all the members of the orchestra should play a violin, a cornet, or a drum. There are in religion underlying unities and profound verities that do not change. The surface phenomena will remain as divergent as are the features, tastes, surroundings, customs, and social ideals of the devotees.

Religion also differs with advancement in civilization. Primitive peoples cannot possibly worship the gods of cultured races. It is one of the conditions of the success of Catholicism in Europe and among savage tribes at the present time that it allows the worshipers to retain for a time their cruder ceremonies and beliefs, only changing gradually the names and forms, if at all, to conform ostensibly to the Christian religion. Even more remarkable are the accommodations of Buddhism to all classes of men as widely divergent as the cultured Hindus of India and Ceylon and the formalistic type of mind of the Chinese. In such plasticity is to be found perhaps a reason that Buddhism can claim more adherents than any other religion.

The religion of childhood differs from that of mature years, and must of necessity be different. Children, like savages, can possess just such a religion as they have minds and hearts to comprehend. The notion of religion apart from consciousness is a mere abstraction. It consists just in the quality of the responses life is making to the world-forces playing about it and within it. Its content is no other than the complex of instinct-feelings and will-impulsions that move the soul. It changes its form and content as life changes, for it is a function of developing consciousness. The most serious error of

religious education has been and is the conception that religion is a fixed something existing independently of the life of mankind, that is to be acquired, if perchance at all, in just one way alike for all. Mark Twain somewhere says, à propos of somebody's claim that the Gulf of Mexico formerly extended as far north as St. Louis, that the Mississippi River must then have stuck out hundreds of miles like a fishing pole into the Gulf. It probably did not do so. No more does religion protrude out into the life of the Absolute apart from human experience. What reason is there for continuing the artificial separation of the spiritual and natural? Why cut asunder as with a hatchet, as Anaxagoras called it, that which is a unity? A living and consistent idea of God is not easily consonant with an opposition between a world of nature and a world of grace. The kingdom of heaven is with men. It is also with savages and children. The laws of its evolution are psychological laws. He who would be a student of religion will be a student of human nature. He will seek especially to know child nature in which religion is to be found in the making. He who aspires to be a religious teacher of children must not seek to discover some transcendent order that is at variance with the order of nature, but will be a worker together with nature in fulfilling a process of development that is at the same time both natural and spiritual.<sup>1</sup>

It is now generally recognized that children not only differ from adults, but that they furthermore pass through several distinct "stages" or "epochs" on the way from babyhood to full maturity. These stages, it is assumed, are weak copies or "recapitulations" of the stages through which the organized life of the adults of the species has passed in its history. Great turning-points in race history have produced also definite transitions in the development of offspring. The life and customs of each generation fasten themselves upon the young through imitation and pass on into succeeding generations. Through habitual response the conventional and stereotyped modes of life of

<sup>1</sup> Scientists have sometimes yielded to the temptation to draw an artificial line between the spiritual and natural. A marked instance in recent years is that of Professor Huxley in his essay, "Evolution and Ethics," in which he claims that the later-appearing ethical order is at variance with the cosmic order and could not have come through it. There is some irony in the fact that the error of such a contention was pointed out by a clergyman. Drummond, in his volume, the *Ascent of Man*, shows that the roots of morality and religion are present in the most primitive life of animals.

adults crop out in succeeding generations as bodily structure, instinct-feeling, and instinct-reaction. Hence it is that before birth the embryo mimics in succession all the types of life from that of the primitive unicellular organism on through the various gradations to that of the particular branch of the "genealogical tree" in which the person is to pass his adult existence. Hence it is also that the mental and spiritual life of the child from birth onward also contains a summary in its growth of the course of relatively recent race history. The conformity to the racial type is, at first, very close. The infant does not move as through a trackless waste, but along a great highway, mapped out for it ages beforehand, which it must travel if its growth is to be normal.<sup>2</sup> The teacher can do little but "guard and protect" during these years. Gradually during later stages the way becomes more uncertain and devious, and it is here that the work of the teacher may become a part of the teleology of nature in steadying and directing the life.

The recognition of the stages in growth is now in a fair way toward becoming incorporated in secular education. The equally patent truth in matters of religious training is still sadly in abeyance. The first desideratum is more knowledge about what the stages are, an accurate determination of the natural history of the religious life of children. What are the epochs and what the characteristics of each, through which children pass? Much has been done in answer to the question, and there is considerable agreement among the students of child-life upon it.<sup>3</sup> The apparent differences of opinion are often only a matter of selection of those facts among the many which may best be chosen as the turning-points, just as students of American history, for example, may agree upon the essential facts but mark out the periods in our national growth quite differently. The number of stages in child development and the peculiarities of each will, at a superficial glance, seem different to a physiologist, a physician, and a psychologist, as

<sup>2</sup> To show the fixity and lawfulness of the development of children and the futility of trying to work at variance with nature's ends, I have accumulated an array of facts in another series of articles in the *Homiletic Review*. See especially the article "Predestination," in the December, 1906, number.

<sup>3</sup> For a full discussion of the manifold divisions of childhood into its periods by various students see A. F. Chamberlain, *The Child*, pp. 66 ff.

in the other instance the national epochs will receive a subjective coloring to the banker, the statesman, and the military officer.

I propose to consider the span of life from birth to the attainment of full maturity which falls somewhere in the twenties, as divided into four stages. The first stage extends from birth to the end of the first year; the second, from the second to about the seventh year; the third, from the seventh to approximately the thirteenth; and the fourth, on up to about the twenty-fourth year. We shall call these four stages, for convenience, babyhood, childhood, youth, and adolescence. The value of such a division is that it harmonizes in the best way the greatest number of facts so far ascertained in regard to childhood.

It will be well, in advance, to distinguish the factual from the theoretical aspect of the question. There has been much fruitless speculation about the nature of child-life. Assuming the truth of the law that children repeat, in a general way, the course of race development, there have been those who would build great generalizations about the stages in the evolution of animals and men and proceed to make inferences about the nature of childhood. While this method has its value, the safer one is exactly the reverse. Children we have always with us. There is nothing the exacting methods of science may not hope to discover in regard to child nature through careful observation and experimentation. The demarkation of the stages of growth is a question for empirical psychology and not for biology and anthropology. As the facts about child-life are systematized, the anthropologist may well use them in reconstructing in his imagination the unwritten history of ages that have left no record behind them. The heroic guesses about the nature of that history are useful by way of finding possible meanings where none otherwise appear. We shall indulge occasionally in such a play of fancy; but let not the fascination of the hypothesis be mistaken for scientific certainty.

The four stages are alike in that each begins in a crisis or stress. These seem to be indications of a difficulty of adjustment to a new type of life. The fourth one, the "period of storm and stress," has long been recognized. It comes in the early teens and the marks of depression and difficulty center about the thirteenth year as being especially the point of transition to the adolescent stage. Growth is

at the expense of development. There is, on the average, lessened physical endurance; frequent organic disturbances occur; there is ungainly carriage, bodily and mentally; in many respects a lowering of mental acumen, and frequently a failure to progress aesthetically and religiously.<sup>4</sup>

The next earlier period of stress is also coming to be well recognized. Its existence was first definitely established by Dr. W. S. Christopher.<sup>5</sup> He observed the frequency of depression, at about seven years, in circulatory and nervous tone. Numerous experimental tests of ability since have corroborated his conclusion. Physical endurance at seven and eight years is less even than at six. There is also a decline in many of the tests upon sensory discrimination. This lack of power to focalize upon neat distinctions is a sign of mental incoherency. It is a most suggestive fact that this period of stress occurs in the midst of the second teething.

The second stress period falls in the early part of the first teething. The "cutting of the teeth" which is popularly supposed to be the cause of the difficulty is now known to be but a superficial indication of the radical readjustments that are going on in the entire alimentary tract. The character of the secretion of all the glands is altered as if in preparation for the assimilation of different kinds of food. There are corresponding mental upheavals, according to the observations of Professor Bailey, accompanying the organic difficulties. The most noticeable mental stress is, however, a few months later than that of the digestive tract. During the second year there is apt to be unusual fretfulness and ill-temper. This is caused in part, perhaps, by the fact that the understanding and needs have outrun the power of language and other means of expression. But it is due, in large measure, presumably, to a lack of organization and unity in the individuality of the child.

The first stress follows immediately after birth. The shock of the new surroundings, which the babe first meets with a wail, is so severe that many infants succumb to it entirely. In almost all there is

<sup>4</sup> For a summary of some of the details that mark the thirteenth as a year of retarded mental growth in general and a "dead period" in religion, see my volume, *The Psychology of Religion*, pp. 209-12.

<sup>5</sup> W. S. Christopher, "Three Crises in Child Life," *Child-Study Monthly*, Vol. III, pp. 324-35.

perceptible loss of weight, excessive drowsiness, and other marks of maladjustment.

These periods of stress are clearly the result of more or less suddenly breaking up an old set of processes that are self-consistent and orderly and preparing for a new and more complicated type of personality with different habits and interests. The difficulties are just such as would be met by an adult with fixed habits of dress, speech, diet, and social ways, were he suddenly to migrate to a new country.

These stress periods are the times for the exercise of the greatest wisdom in the tuition of children. True wisdom will often consist in judiciously letting alone and being patient while the intricate and marvelous transformations work themselves out. Nature, whose ways are wise enough to bring a child to its first birth without the interference of the tinkering of parents and pedagogues, can be trusted also to accomplish these successive rebirths in a normal manner. The function of the parent and teacher is chiefly to surround the child with the warmth of love and the sunshine of good cheer and so create an atmosphere in which it may grow, rather than to hasten and stimulate its development.

Just as each of these stages has its inception in a period of stress, each has also its culmination toward its close, of real development and coherency, both bodily and mental: the cheery, responsive, blossoming personality of the baby during the latter part of the first year; the airy, graceful naturalness of the rollicking child of four or five; the quick, keen senses, and busy, acquisitive mind of the youth of eleven or twelve, and the spirited manliness and womanliness and proud individuality of the adolescent in the late teens and early twenties.<sup>6</sup> In the strictest sense these periods of culmination are not periods of acceleration in growth and development as also those of stress are not in reality times of retardation. The number of foot-pounds of energy per year, let us say, expended in the organism is perhaps a constant, or constantly varying, quantity from year to year.

<sup>6</sup> In the voluminous literature of child-study many facts indicate the existence of these successive nascent periods of ripening of the personality. I shall give but a single reference upon each period: on babyhood, Milicent Shinn, *The Biography of a Baby*, chaps. ix ff.; on childhood, James Sully, *Studies of Childhood*, pp. 54-90; on youth, J. A. Gilbert, *Studies from the Yale Psychological Laboratory*, Vol. II, pp. 80 ff.; on adolescence, E. D. Starbuck, *Psychology of Religion*, pp. 251-67.

But development is at the expense of growth when each stage is at its height, while the reverse is true during the crises. The original difficulty and then a sense of mastery in each successive stage, are analagous to the phenomena in learning a new game or vocation. At first the reactions are unsteady and awkward, but later are spontaneous, and the game or vocation seems to play itself through the individual. There is the difference that the growth stages involve the entire personality, and a longer time of apprenticeship is required until the life normal to each period can become natural and lived artistically from the inside, and one's energy be expended upon the situations to be met rather than on a mastery of self.

The flowering of each stage is a certain superadded spontaneity, which shows itself in the free play of the imagination. In babyhood it is little more than a mere imaging, a retention of memory pictures in the absence of perceptual objects. In childhood it is the joy of hearing and telling stories and building air-castles. In youth there appears a glad sense of power in playing games, in manual construction, and in mechanical ingenuity. In adolescence ideals are set free and may find their expression through poetic effusions, schemes of reform, bold speculation, romantic loves, or religious fervor.

Between the periods of stress and culmination there is recurrence in each stage of a state of openness and receptivity. The mind reaches out to try to assimilate the larger world outside. This is shown in the sense-hunger, curiosity, "open-eyed wonder," and insistent imitativeness of the first stage. In the second appears the questioning age, at its height in the fourth year,<sup>7</sup> when "question after question is fired off with wondrous rapidity and pertinacity," a phenomenon which is "connected with the throes which the young understanding has to endure in its first collision with a tough and baffling world." Another phase of this impulse during this period is the magpie instinct to collect a conglomerate array of precious articles whose imaginary value only betrays nature's purpose of widening the child's personality. Toward middle youth this impulse springs up afresh and shows itself in an interest in nature phenomena. This time it is not an animistic interpretation of nature, embodied in myth, story, and legend, but the interest centers in an intelligent appreciation and use of natural objects.

<sup>7</sup> According to Sully, *Studies of Childhood*, pp. 75-90.



There is a recrudescence of the impulse to dissect and take to pieces mechanical contrivances, but now with a will to understand the principle of their construction. In early adolescence this impulse is again revived. Now the instinctive hunger is in terms of a world of ideas and of social relationships. There arises, under normal conditions, a craving to comprehend life and nature. Hence the serious doubts and questionings of many kinds. The instinctive quality of this tendency is evident from the fact that, just as during the "questioning age" of childhood, the mind is driven to face "its tough and baffling world" and to digest its problems in spite of much pain and discomfort. The "throes it has to endure" in widening its experiences have won for these particular years the designation of the period of storm and stress. At this time the scientific impulse has its birth, when one is impelled by a desire to comprehend a causally related world. In this mind- and heart-hunger there is the first profound moving toward the life of religion. Indeed its inception has been found to be confined largely to the years from thirteen to eighteen.

Each stage, if we should recur to the crude analogy of the physical organism mentioned in an earlier article, corresponds to a reorganization of the self with the center of organization of the personality, shifting gradually to higher "levels" of the nervous system. The center of self during babyhood would seem to be in the spinal cord and medulla, and through the succeeding stages it rises gradually, though intermittently, to basal ganglia, the sensory centers of the cerebrum and then, in adolescence, to the association or ideational centers of the hemispheres.<sup>8</sup>

In terms of the mental life each stage corresponds to a *new birth of self*. It is hardly capable of being doubted, though the theory has little other than speculative interest, that each is the counterpart in the growing individual of great epochs brought about by rather sudden changes in modes of life of ancestral development. The first stage consists in the birth of a *vegetative self* with its sensori-motor and appetitive interests. The second is marked by the creation of a *responsive but irresponsible social self*. In the child and in the race

<sup>8</sup> The student who wishes to follow up the anatomical basis of such a description will find a convenient introduction to it in H. H. Donaldson's *The Growth of the Brain*.

it seems to be ushered in by the invention of language. This discovery, shall we say, has occasioned such an extension of adult life in the direction of social interests and, through the use of words, in formation of ideas and use of the imagination, as to require a special series of years during which the child may enter into its inheritance of them. If we could safely picture this early life as a loose, nomadic, nature life, with its small, incoherent, individualistic social units, it would furnish an easy explanation of many of the characteristics of the period of childhood: its moral indifference, its inconstancy, its individualism united though not blended with a need of companions, and its rapport with nature so intimate as to make a nature religion of fancy and feeling the only vital religion of childhood, just as it is the only religion of primitive peoples. The selfhood that, under normal condition, has its birth during youth, is *one of efficiency*. It is in no sense a sentimental period. As has been pointed out by Lukens in studying children's writing and drawing, during youth the ability to accomplish results is far in advance of the power of appreciation, just as in adolescence the opposite is true. This is noticeable in many other things than drawing and writing. In adolescence the tendency prevails to think before one acts, and not infrequently the person, Hamlet-like, allows a whole series of thought relations to detach themselves entirely from conduct. The youth, on the contrary, is more likely to act before he thinks, or even to move along, so far as matters outside his immediate interest are concerned, almost entirely thought-free. Within the narrow range of his interest he is thoughtful enough—quick, keen, and effectual. His senses, for example, are more acute in detecting fine shades of difference, as shown by many kinds of experiments, than they will ever be again. His muscles develop normally in both skill and endurance. But on the contrary, his mental powers, in their ability to deal with abstract conceptions, make very little progress. His mental life is factual rather than ideational. If we shall be allowed another bit of gratuitous speculation, let us say that this period in the child's life corresponds to the discovery and use, in race life, of tools and machinery. Their use would naturally bring about the cultivation of the soil, the use of grains as foods, the patching off of the earth into places of fixed habitation and the establishment of more or less permanent though individualistic social relations. It is a

curious fact that the exchange of the permanent for the "milk" teeth marks the beginning of this stage, and that they are coarser, more blunt, and greater in number than the first set, as if adapted to the use of grain and vegetable rather than meat diet. This hypothesis would seem to throw light, again, upon many of the peculiarities of youth. The religion of this period, if indeed it can be said to possess a religion at all, is one of doing. As a matter of fact, the conventional meaning of the term religion has perhaps been distorted to fit only the adolescent type of mind which emphasizes its emotional content, and might be improved by such a widening of meaning as to include also the religion of youth which is that also of James the disciple. If our forbears are to be held responsible for the nature of youth, it would seem that they were so much occupied with conquering the earth and each other that there was little time remaining for sentimentality. The products of the fancies of the earlier period are undoubtedly carried over into youth and furnish the anthropomorphic background of its religion. These fancies become most lively realities when they can be used in carrying out some plan or answering some need, and are invoked as being verities. This is true also among primitive peoples. If one catches the spirit of the Vedas, for example, the gods, which are apparently the survival of the nature gods of earlier times, are constantly appealed to as celestial aids in accomplishing the undoing of enemies and in securing friends, crops, herds, and many children. The latter part of this stage is rich in anticipations of the adolescent conception of God as reality. There is often a strange mixture of the conceptions of God as talisman with the maturer one which usually ripens in the later stage.

Adolescence witnesses the birth of *a mental and spiritual and also a social self*. Its antecedent in race experiences would seem to be the formation of larger and more highly organized social units. It is conceivable that the impelling force that led to these larger and more closely knit groups was the beginning of barter, trade, and commerce, and the suddenly dawning consciousness of the utility of the interchange of commodities and of intermingling. This would lead naturally to an exchange of ideas and this, together with a fuller knowledge of the world, would stimulate thought and give rise to scientific reflection. Through the gaining of larger audiences the impulse to literature and

art would be nourished and find channels for its expression. Appreciating the benefits of a wider intercourse, there may have been a sharp transition in the encouragement of it and in the fostering of science, the arts, and literature. However that may be, it is a well-established fact that there is usually a sudden and vigorous readjustment in individual development in the early teens, to a life of appreciation and understanding.

The advantages of more extended communities, with industrial, social, and political reciprocity, could not accrue without a cultivation of the group instincts and a strengthening of the social ties. These must have needed a powerful stimulus to overcome the insistence of the individualistic impulses. Hence it was, let us suppose, that the deeper sense of need, and of possible harmony and fulfilment of peoples, has given rise to a sweeping condemnation of self-regard and an apotheosis in every possible way of the social impulses. In response to this great need of readjustment special instincts would become differentiated and social institutions created to bring it about. It is conceivable that morality and religion are such instincts, and that many of the social customs and all sacerdotal institutions and ecclesiastical organizations are the instruments for bringing about such a readjustment.

I have given so much space in hinting the possible history that lies back of the early adolescent period because such a description is urgently needed to offset and supplement a mischievous mode of psychological description now very prevalent, that sees the great awakening in the early teens only as a function of the reproductive life and regards religion as simply an irradiation of the sexual instinct. The religious and reproductive awakenings do occur almost simultaneously, as I have shown elsewhere in an extended way.<sup>9</sup> But it is a strange oversight that fails to recognize that the differentiation of the sexual as a special mode of reproduction must have occurred at a time in race life corresponding to the first or second month of foetal life—a time much earlier even than the first of the mental stages we are considering. The evidences of comparative psychology all indicate that the family and close sexual ties must have existed during the entire race history corresponding to all the four periods. It is probably a matter of

<sup>9</sup> *The Psychology of Religion*, chap. ii.

natural and social selection that has shifted the reproductive ripening gradually up to early adolescence. Those individuals and social groups that, for any reason, have postponed for the longest time the exercise of the function, and so have taken advantage of the period of infancy as a growth period rather than to use it as a productive one, have stood the best chance in the struggle for existence and have left offspring after their kind. Those of the contrary tendency would be cut off. Such a process of selection can be seen going on in society at the present time. That the entire group of changes, including the reproductive and religious, should have settled down into the same years, say from thirteen to seventeen, is also, doubtless, a matter of social selection, and results from the fact that the social group has taken consciously under its control the institution of marriage and of participation generally in the tribal life. The study of initiation ceremonies among savage, semicivilized, and civilized races, made by Professor Daniels, shows clearly that among primitive peoples the same ceremony (whose equivalent among Christian communities is "confirmation") introduces the boy both to the family life and to participation as an adult in the affairs of the tribe. In the midst of such customs, that youth who suddenly showed the marks of manhood, in stature, features, mental acumen, social bearing, mating impulse, and spiritual appreciation, would be at an advantage in the social struggle, while that one to whom nature had shown no such favors would be left behind. Whatever the story may be that lies behind the period, it is evident that adolescence is the natural time of the ripening of a higher spiritual selfhood, and religion is one of the chief forces within the youth and without him that is to work out in so short a span of years a marvelous transformation of the mind of the youth into the spiritual personality of man or woman.

These four stages (if they have been rightly described) are fixed firmly in the nature of the growing life of the world and cannot be altered by parents and teachers. But they can be understood and used. Some hints on the religion peculiar to each and how to cultivate it will be left for later discussion.